

Captive



Learning how to take control of our thought life

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Introduction

I love the core scripture for this study. About three years ago I came across it in my personal study time and knew right away that I should commit it to memory. I have never regretted it. So many times I have recited it to myself in a prayer of frustration, hope, desperation, you name it! It's one of those great passages that apply to nearly every challenge in life. I hope you find this scripture as life changing as I have.

This study was born of that hope and clearly a need for me to unpack the passage even further on a personal level. What a gift our sovereign Lord brings in this message that speaks to all levels of spiritual maturity. Whether you are just starting out in your walk with the Lord or you have logged many miles on that path, my prayer is that this study will help these verses in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians wash over you in a way that you never expected. I know that it will—that's why it's called the Living Word.

Three study notes: First, I intentionally leave the reverse side of each page in this study blank for your notes and reflections. I would have had 'your notes' printed on the pages, but two sided copying is more expensive than one sided and good stewardship dictates that I don't waste the money on two words per page. But please take the opportunity to jot down your thoughts and the gifts that the Spirit gives you throughout your study and group time. Second, you will notice that I repeat the same two questions after each lesson: (1) How did God speak directly to you today? (2) What is your response to Him? These two questions are

included to remind you that God wants you to take His Word very seriously. Answering these questions after each section will train you to look for God's personal message to you each time you open the Bible. Third, as this study is so heavily rooted in one core piece of the Bible (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) I felt compelled to read those verses in every translation I could get my hands on. After perusing about ten translations, I picked the New King James Version for the phrasing I based the study upon. I have found this translation best reflects the original language of the text. That being said, my favorite Bible, the one that I take with me to church, the one that I keep by my bed, the one that I use for personal study and quiet time, is an NIV (New International Version). I revert back to it like a dog who knows where the food bowl is found. So, with the exception of the core scripture I refer to the NIV translation unless otherwise noted. I encourage you to look at this verse in multiple translations also. It will deepen your study of it.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God—Philippians 1:9-11

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The Problem with our Thoughts*

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things.-Philippians 4:8

The Problem with our thoughts:

1. The _____.

God wants to use the good and bad of our past in ministering to our present, as well as to others. As we grow in _____ we get a new perspective on our past. But the enemy of our peace, namely the devil, will use our past as a way to harass us.

2. The _____.

What we allow into our mind through simple habits greatly affects our thoughts.

Examples: _____, _____,
_____.

3. _____ living vs. _____ living.

- Psalm 139:5-6 _____ our thoughts
- Colossians 3:1-2/Philippians 4:8 _____ our thoughts
- Psalm 101:2-3, Mark 9:43 _____ our thoughts

*Please refer to the podcast or website for the content of this group lesson.

Taking Control of Our Thought Life

*For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace
-Romans 8:6 (NASB)*

A penny for your thoughts. What are you thinking these days? How do you set your mind at rest? Or do you? Many of us have little to no peace inside our own minds. We complain of stress, insomnia, ulcers, and more. Like the annoying stream at the bottom of the news channel, we can't seem to get the ticker in our own brains to shut off for a moment of peace. Who can blame us? We are doing so much more than the generations before us. More is required of us, as workers, parents, Christians. Wait, Christians? Sure. We all know that we are to be the "Purpose Driven" generation of believers. It is no longer satisfactory to sit faithfully in the pew on Sundays—we've got to get a ministry, a mission, an outwardly obvious, quantifiable, quality Christian LIFE. That's a lot of pressure even if we had nothing else on our plate.

But what's going on underground? Where are you when no one's watching and you have the freedom to just be still? What about during the day, when you are confronted with life's obstacles, many and varied as they are—a grouchy coworker, a rebellious child, a non-believing spouse. Perhaps you have conquered the evil of the untamed tongue described in James 3, and you don't let fly with all your thoughts, but you still have them. Don't we all?!?! In fact, the passage above from Romans 8 goes on to say "Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so (v.7)" Didn't Jesus do the work on the cross because my nature IS sinful? How much can I really change here? Well, here's the great news: not only can we do better, we've got help available. Caught up in the chaos of your untamed thoughts? God offers something better. In fact, He requires it.

Take a look at the following passage and record your thoughts on the theme:

Galatians 5:22-23

That wonderful (if sometimes flabbergasting) list in Galatians called the “fruit of the Spirit” has a simple, sweet ending—self-control. Because these qualities are listed as a result of the Spirit of God dwelling in us, we are not wholly responsible for their development. I am really thankful for that. I know I need help making even one of those characteristics a reality in my life.

So let’s take this passage in Galatians and partner it with the end of our key scripture from Romans 8, picking up at verse 9. “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit (emphasis mine).” This offers a powerful promise of the victory we can have in Jesus over our own shortcomings. Jesus accomplished everything we need with His death on the cross—both guarantee of eternal life in heaven with Him and victory over self-stuff in our earthly lives.

This study is about our thought life. The key scripture is 2 Corinthians 10:4-5: *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God, for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (NKJV)*. This week’s passage brings to our attention the importance of choosing our thoughts. Let’s explore together how life-changing those choices can be.

How did God speak directly to you through this week’s lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write 1 Peter 5:7 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. Based on this weeks scripture focus, how would you characterize your own thought life? Would you say you have taken an active or passive role in your own thoughts? In other words, do you control your thoughts or do they control you?

2. Read the following passages and note the application to this lesson:
 - a. Proverbs 15:26
 - b. Matthew 15:16-20
 - c. Psalm 19:14
 - d. Proverbs 4:23

The weapons of our warfare...

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.-Ephesians 6:11

When talking about any kind of spiritual warfare, there's really no better place to start than Ephesians chapter six. In this chapter we can find clearly defined information to help us in our spiritual battle.

Please read Ephesians 6:10-18 and list the weapons of our warfare:

All over the Bible, we can find passages about the attacks of the enemy on our souls, our lives, our ministries. If you doubt for a moment that this battle exists, let's deal with that right now. There's really no point in going forward until you completely embrace the truth that there *is* a battle going on for your mind and soul, and for the minds and souls of those around you. Let's consider the words of Charles Stanley in his book *When the Enemy Strikes*

“You have a powerful enemy, and he has a name...The truth is, good has a name, and His name is God. Evil also has a name. His name is Satan or the devil. The devil refers to a spiritual being who is the supreme personification of evil...Satan may use what your mother-in-law says or a coworker does to come against you. He may use terrorists, criminals, and other people to cause you harm or strike fear into your heart. However...the real enemy is the devil who prompted the person to speak hatred to you, steal from you, and do his utmost to destroy you or physically injure you. Behind every evil person and every evil act lurks the real enemy of your life. He exists in the spirit realm, and he is relentless in his pursuit of you. He is 100% evil, and he has a plan to destroy you life. Satan is your enemy.”ⁱ

Here in Ephesians we have been bluntly given the recipe for success. Take up the weapons that God has armed us with and fight the battle. Being oblivious to the battle doesn't stop it. Nor does hiding from it. Picture the shield of faith. If we are warriors of biblical proportions, our shield should be pretty hefty. But do we cower

behind it, hoping the onslaught will go away? That the enemy will wear himself out? Let me assure you friend, the enemy has been fighting tirelessly for thousands of years. His complete hate for the children of God drives him fiercely forward. You can't wait him out. As Paul so vividly depicts, you must draw your sword and begin the offensive. Make forward movement of your own.

Take a look at these passages about the battle and record your thoughts:

1 Samuel 17:45 _____

Hebrews 4:12 _____

Psalms 124:1-5 _____

We can be sure that because God promises to be by our side, the battle is already won. If only we could embrace our own role in these battles more completely, we might actually see we can win them.

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Micah 7:8 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. If the enemy is real, what battle is going on for you right now? What lies have you been believing, even today, that have taken you off the path of your faith?

2. Read the following passages and note the relevance to this lesson:
 - a. Luke 9:23
 - b. Psalm 101:3
 - c. Philippians 3:12-14
 - d. Psalm 48:9

...are not carnal, but mighty in God...

*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.
-Romans 7:15*

What does it mean to be carnal? The original Greek word used in this passage was *sarkikos*, which means “pertaining to the flesh.” *Sarkikos* is derived from the word *sarx*, which is more revealing and means “the meat of an animal, or the body (as opposed to soul or spirit)...the symbol of what is external...specifically human nature.” Interestingly, the Corinthians seemed to know quite a bit about being carnal. Six of the nine times this word is used in the New Testament are in a letter to the Corinthians. But in many ways, I think Paul captures it best in his letter to the Romans, starting with the above passage. It is the struggle we all live with. I want to do good things, but I end up flat on my face. This is the work of our human nature.

Please read the following passages and reflect on the common theme:

Psalm 19:12-13 _____

Psalm 51:5 _____

Psalm 58:3 _____

Jeremiah 13:23 _____

So it seems then that our own familiarity with the carnal is at least as solid as the Corinthians. We dwell in the pit of our egos, driven like the two-year-old by instant gratification and a thin filter over what comes out of our mouth. Embarrassing isn't it, when we take a good look in the mirror? In this passage, however, Paul uses the carnal descriptive as a way of defining the opposite. He tells us that the weapons at our disposal are NOT fleeting like the unreliability of the world. I find myself doing this with my kids a lot. If they ask me the meaning of a word, I sometimes find it easier to explain to them what that thing is not. Contrast can be a good clarifier.

The original Greek word for *mighty* in this portion of scripture is *dynatos*, and is defined as “powerful or capable.” Interestingly, if we stand the words carnal and mighty side by side in the original language, we see the contrast of “not of the flesh but powerful” and “not of human nature but capable.” The readers of the original

text might have seen more obviously than we do what Paul intends to point out- our flesh is powerless, our human nature is incapable.

By the way, the Greek word for *mighty* used in this passage comes from the root word *dynamai*, which is where we get our word dynamite. There's a visual!

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Ephesians 6:12 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. If we define the “world” as this earth, our dwelling in it, and/or the ruler of worldly things which is Satan, is our spiritual battle

- a. In this world?
- b. Of this world?
- c. About this world?
- d. From this world?
- e. With this world?

2. Read the following passages and note the application to this lesson:

- a. John 8:44
- b. John 10:10
- c. 2 Corinthians 11:3
- d. 1 Peter 5:8

...for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments,
and every high thing that exalts itself against the
knowledge of God...

Fight the good fight of the faith.-1 Timothy 6:12

The story is told of a little boy who came into his mother's kitchen and announced to her, "That was a good fight." The mother looked at her little boy. His shirt was torn and dirty, his jeans were ripped at the knee, and he had a black eye and a big scrape on his elbow. "What was so good about it?" she asked. He replied, "I won."ⁱⁱ

The above scripture passage tells us to fight the good fight of the faith. What makes it a good fight? We are on the winning side. Satan is a defeated foe. His eternal fate was sealed by the work on the cross. He will spend eternity in a lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). We also know that He is powerless to steal from us our eternal salvation once it has been secured through our belief in Jesus Christ, His work on the cross, and His resurrection (John 3:16). So His *only power* is to lie to believers in such convincing ways that we would partially or completely waste the "abundant life" Jesus intended for us here on earth. Satan goes about that in at least three ways: the strongholds, arguments, and high things described in our 2 Corinthians passage. Let's break them down.

Strongholds

This has become a Christian buzzword, and yet a real definition eluded me. I went to the dictionary and found "a well-fortified place; fortress." I went to Christian authors and found "a stronghold is an area of thinking in which we allow Satan entry." Even my Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, which gives me the original language, struggles to nail down this word, by defining *ochyroma* (the translation from the 2 Corinthians passage) as a "remote derivative" of another word which means "to fortify, through the idea of holding safely." If we piece these all together, we begin to understand the concept as it is intended. A stronghold is an area of our lives where we have allowed ourselves to believe Satan's lies, and encouraged a "fortification," through our "holding safely" to that lie. Some examples might include addictions, doubts, guilt, and despair. Some might say a stronghold is something that has a *strong hold* on our lives. I would argue that we must have a *strong hold* of our own on it as well. It requires our cooperation.

A favorite preacher of mine often says that Satan does not start with a stronghold. Instead, he starts with a toehold, then gets a foothold, and works up to a stronghold. Based on the above understanding of a stronghold, how does Satan go about doing this?

Write 2 Corinthians 4:4:

Based on this passage, how does the believer battle the stronghold?

Arguments

Satan is constantly trying to engage us in conversations loaded with 'but' and 'if' statements. He seeks to place conditions and qualifiers on who God is, who you are, and how you might relate to God or others. If you are in a thought process or conversation that continually interjects "but" and "what if" and "but what about," the devil is using that moment as a debate solely for the pleasure of disagreement, not as a means of getting to the truth of an issue.

Write Colossians 3:15:

Pairing the understanding of *arguments* with the passage from Colossians, how would a believer go about “casting down arguments?”

High Things

More specifically, we’re looking to define the “high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.” These are any things you put above your pursuit of a relationship with the Living God. The easy answers are those things we call “idols” such as money or material goods. Certainly we would also put pride in this category. When we focus on ourselves, we crowd out the credit that only God deserves. But many people have another, sometimes deadly idolatry of the self, and that is low self-esteem. Here we are still focusing on ourselves, but not in the way that would be defined as pride. Instead, we focus so much on our own shortcomings, that we set our own thoughts against the knowledge of God in the areas of grace, mercy or provision.

Read the following passages and note the relevance to “high things.”

Genesis 14:22 _____

Psalms 21:7 _____

Daniel 4:17 _____

Mark 5:7 _____

The NIV version translates this portion as “pretension” instead of “high thing.” This gives us even further insight to the “pretending,” since God is Most High.

Using 1 Peter 5:6-7, and the example of Paul earlier using opposites as guides, detail how the believer can battle against “high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God:”

High things only get there one of two ways—either we push them up, above the position of God in our lives, or we fail to pull them down.

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Philippians 4:6-7 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. By using examples from your life, review and elaborate on 1)the definition of and 2)how we gain victory over the following:
 - a. strongholds
 - b. arguments
 - c. high things

2. Read the following passages and note the application to this lesson:
 - a. 1 Corinthians 1:19
 - b. Psalm 139:5-6
 - c. 1 Corinthians 2:5
 - d. Job 38:2

...bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. –Romans 12:2

Obviously, this is the hot button- how do we capture a thought before it runs away with us? How do we become tuned in to the first wrong thinking ways so that we can control our thoughts instead of letting them control us? Believing we can do it is the first step.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:16 and record the last seven words here.

When did you get this gift? The moment you believed in Christ.

Read John 15 and note verse 4 here

Jesus said He came to abide in us and we abide in Him. You and I have the capacity to think the way Jesus thinks because He's in us. If we allow the process to take place, we can think rightly, Godly, holy, righteously- thoughts of love and forgiveness because we have the mind of Christ.

Clearly since you have made it this far in the study, you want to have the mind of Christ. If we examine this final part of the 2 Corinthians passage, we see how to go about it. First, we see the word "bringing." The simple message here is again in the contrast: it's not *allowing* or *watching*. This is not a passive action but an aggressive one. *Bringing* can be defined as "to carry or somehow physically effect the position of a thing from one place to the destination of your choosing." *Bringing* is a word that invokes our accompaniment. We are not moving that thing by throwing it or

otherwise casting it into the desired position but rather by bringing it along with us, as a companion of some sort.

Next we see the imperative of “every.” Here again, in contrast, it’s not *some*, *a few*, or even *many*. It’s every thought about every topic- finances, relationships, school and/or work.

Finally, let’s look at the last portion as a whole... “into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Different words for the same concept of 1 Corinthians 2:16 above, the mind of Christ.

Again, we have here an aggressive action: bringing something into captivity implies there will be resistance by that thing. Captivity is not a place one willingly goes. Remember the passage from Romans 8 that affirms this.

Read 2 Peter 2:18-19 and note the caution about captivity here

For that matter, “obedience” implies submission as well.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:13 for encouragement in that obedience, and note it here:

It helps to remember from the first lesson of this study that self-control is not wholly ours to accomplish (Galatians 5:22). But, we must make a choice to allow the fruit to be cultivated in our life. We do this by choosing to accept or reject thoughts as they come up and by sifting every thought through God’s word and His will.

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts here. The only way to know God’s word and will is to read the Bible every day and study it for the answers to our questions. Over time we begin to see that God is changeless and the Bible is consistent, so when we ask ourselves “what is the will of the Father?” or “what does God’s word say about this?” we understand Him well enough to answer. Lifting the thoughts or situations up in prayer then becomes more of an agreement than a question.

The disconnect for so many of us is that we worship like Christians, we pray like Christians, but we don’t live like Christians because we don’t think like Christ. As we are God’s children, let’s think of our own kids for a moment. I can predict with a pretty high level of accuracy what my children will do and say in a given scenario.

While I am wildly far from perfect consistency, I believe my kids could predict most of my responses to circumstances too. God wants us to know Him that way. This is how we get our “mind of Christ” to work in our everyday lives.

Read the following passages and note what we are encouraged to do in each:

Psalm 48:9 _____

Psalm 77:2 _____

Psalm 119:5, 27, 48 _____

The writers of these Psalms understood that spending time reading God’s Word and getting to know Him gives us the ability to answer more readily the following question~ what does God think about this and why? Whatever that thinking is, I want to agree with it. All sin begins in our disagreement with God on things we think or do.

Let’s set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:1-2). Let’s seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:22), and watch the life changing effects.

How did God speak directly to you through this week’s lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Philippians 4:8 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. Read the following passages and note the application to this lesson:

- a. Matthew 6:22
- b. Mark 9:43
- c. Psalm 101:2-3
- d. Colossians 3:16
- e. Psalm 26:2
- f. Jeremiah 17:10
- g. Psalm 94:8
- h. Ecclesiastes 11:10

ⁱ Charles Stanley, *When the Enemy Strikes* (Thomas Nelson 2004), 5

ⁱⁱ Charles Stanley, *When the Enemy Strikes* (Thomas Nelson 2004), 21